5: Harrison D-4 (1912-1924) 1924 M1 Middle East
Maritime Arabs MK2

CHAPTER IV

PEARL DIVERS OF THE EAST COAST

ALONG the East Coast of Arabia are located the largest pearl fisheries in the world. Pearl fishing has been the occupation of that part of Arabia for many centuries. Probably a hundred thousand Arabs are engaged in this hard and dangerous work throughout the summer months. Half a million people must depend on these divers for their livelihood. This is not a large percentage of the inhabitants of Arabia, but the pearl divers are worthy of consideration, for the outside world has come into closer contact with them than with any other Arab community in the entire peninsula. As might be expected, the coast cities contain artisans, laborers, a few date gardeners, and merchants. These differ in no significant way from similar classes elsewhere. The pearl diving community is unique.

Nothing can exceed the barrenness of the coast where these men live. From Kuwait in the north to Ras el Kheima in the south, a distance of three hundred miles, scarcely a green thing is to be seen, except for a few miles of date gardens at Katif and a smaller number at Dibai. The water available for drinking is brackish and almost undrinkable in many places. The inhabitants of Umm el Qaiwain, one of these towns, "drink mud," to quote the Arabs. The coast is so utterly unproductive that all food must be imported, and in some places even the fuel and drinking water.